

VZCZCXYZ0013
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHWL #0073 0581919
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 271919Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5102
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0394
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 5120
RUEHHI/AMEMBASSY HANOI PRIORITY 0061
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 0293
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0699

C O N F I D E N T I A L WELLINGTON 000073

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/ANP, WHA FO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/27/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NZ](#) [CU](#)

SUBJECT: US AND NEW ZEALAND ON THE SAME PAGE REGARDING CUBA

REF: STATE 18306

Classified By: Acting DCM Margaret McKean; Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) On February 27, A/DCM met with MFAT Deputy Secretary John McArthur to deliver demarche points. A/DCM noted that the handover to Raul Castro would not constitute systemic change; only elections and improvement in human rights will signal meaningful progress towards democracy. McArthur agreed with the USG message, noting that the change was anticipated over a year ago when Castro's brother took power temporarily from the ailing Cuban leader. Even with his brother officially in charge, McArthur predicted that Fidel Castro would continue to wield influence from the behind the scenes. He referred to PM Helen Clark's comments regarding Raul Castro's selection by the Cuban Assembly, in which the PM noted that Fidel Castro's decision to step down had not come as a surprise, and that Fidel Castro's continued influence "is to be expected." The Deputy Secretary summarized New Zealand's position on the Cuban leadership transition by saying that the US and New Zealand "are on the same page."

¶2. (C) McArthur reminded A/DCM that NZ-Cuban bilateral ties are minimal and dominated by NZ dairy exports, which comprise an estimated 70 percent of the milk drunk in Cuba. He noted that the GNZ's interest in Cuba is designed to protect those trade links as well as to maintain a communication mechanism for discussion of human rights and other topics. The Cuban government engages in limited educational exchange programs in New Zealand, he added. New Zealand does not maintain a Embassy in Havana; rather, Cuba is covered by GNZ diplomats in Mexico. Cuba's mission in Wellington was only established late last year, consisting of its Ambassador, Jose Luis Robaina Garcia. McArthur informed us that a Cuban delegation will be visiting New Zealand in mid-March as part of an Asian tour. Head of the delegation will be Ruben Perez Valdes, Ambassador and Deputy Director of the Asia and Pacific Division. McArthur speculated that the visit may coincide with the official opening of the Cuban Embassy in Wellington, adding that a Deputy Chief of Mission is also slated to arrive in the near future.

¶3. (C) A/DCM thanked the Deputy Secretary for his response, noting that the US Embassy appreciates updates on the Cuban mission's activities. McArthur offered that the Cuban government's decision to open a mission in either Australia or New Zealand had been predicated on a desire to conduct greater outreach to the Pacific island nations. To date, however, the GNZ has not detected an uptick in activities, he said.

MCCORMICK